

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES REVIEW

Medpedia. Medpedia, 703 Market Street, Suite 470, San Francisco, CA, 94103; <http://www.medpedia.com>; free website

In December 2005, *Nature* published results of a study investigating the accuracy of Wikipedia compared to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [1]. In the blinded review of articles from each source, *Nature's* expert reviewers found Wikipedia only slightly more error prone than *Britannica*, setting off a maelstrom of discussions on authority, accuracy, and expert knowledge versus wisdom of crowds throughout the scientific community and blogosphere. More recently, studies have investigated the accuracy, scope, and completeness of Wikipedia's drug information (it could answer only 40% of drug information questions) [2]; the number of citations to scientific publications [3]; and physicians' use of Wikipedia to answer medical questions (an estimated 50%–70% do so) [4, 5]. Clearly, Wikipedia is of both great utility and great concern. Another article wisely questions, "Does Wikipedia matter?": in a world where "Wikipedia ranked among the first ten results in 71–85% of search engines and [medical] keywords tested"; the answer is certainly yes [6]. But with the concerns over Wikipedia's accuracy and authoritativeness, can it be trusted? Should physicians use a reference source that can be edited by anyone? Many have sought to answer this question, and one of these answers is Medpedia.

Medpedia is a collaboratively created and edited wiki, designed as a medical reference source for both medical professionals and consumers. According to the Medpedia website, Medpedia is a "long term, worldwide project to evolve a new model for sharing and advancing knowledge about health, medicine and the body." The new model primarily refers not only to the wiki, multiauthored nature of the site, but also to its differences from traditional medi-

cal publishing models. Medpedia tries to blend the openness of wikis with the authoritativeness of a typical medical textbook, relying solely on approved physicians and doctoral-degreed individuals in biomedical specialties to create and edit content. Other health professionals can register for accounts and submit suggestions for changes and new topics, but they cannot have direct editing privileges, neither can the general public. This sets Medpedia to a higher standard than Wikipedia (although it lacks the formal peer review of more traditional content types), but this approach may backfire if not enough volunteer contributors switch their allegiances to this product. Working on a crowd-sourced text is a labor of love.

To induce volunteers to contribute their time, Medpedia has instigated several methods of rewarding authors. One issue with many wikis, even medical wikis, is that author contributions are not acknowledged individually. For example, another medical professional-developed wiki, Ask Dr. Wiki, only lists author names on a few pages. To discover authorship, it is instead necessary to go to page histories. Obviously, this means that physician and scientist contributors will find it difficult to get credit for their work. To resolve this issue, Medpedia features a directory of medical editor profiles. Each profile can contain information about the editor (e.g., name, education history, background, specialty areas) as well as Medpedia-specific details: lists of article edits, Medpedia group memberships, and articles where a member has taken lead editorship. In addition, other members get five "tokens of appreciation" a week to award other members, a small sign of acknowledgment for contribution. Each article also lists the lead editors quite prominently, as are the originating authors of new articles.

The content of Medpedia is varied and at present not clearly developed. Topics vary from

"Controlling Your Anger" to "Childhood Extracranial Germ Cell Tumors" to "Thunder God Vine." The wide variety and purpose of these articles seems due to the content the wiki was initially seeded with. The seed content was provided by several institutions and organizations (e.g., Harvard University Medical School, University of Michigan Medical School) that have not only released the initial content from copyright, but also committed to create additional content. The content is released under the GNU Free Documentation License, allowing distribution, copying, and modification with acknowledgement and continuation of the license terms.

At present, Medpedia is more a set of ideals than a workable reference source. Acknowledging that the site is in its fledgling stages, the editors note that it will be under development for several years, and this is clearly noticeable in the lack of topical breadth and depth, as well as by the number of articles missing one or more components. For example, though one of the site's key features is a dual-language approach for each topic—one page in plain language for health care consumers, another rife with medical terminology for health professionals—many topics have only one or the other. Perhaps of even more concern in today's Google-centric world is that topic pages are not highly ranked or even findable. Though one can expect this to change if the quality and depth of the website content improves, for now it means that Wikipedia will continue to be the medical wiki of choice.

Melissa L. Rethlefsen, MLS,
mlrethlefsen@gmail.com, Mayo Clinic
Libraries, Mayo Clinic, Rochester,
MN

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